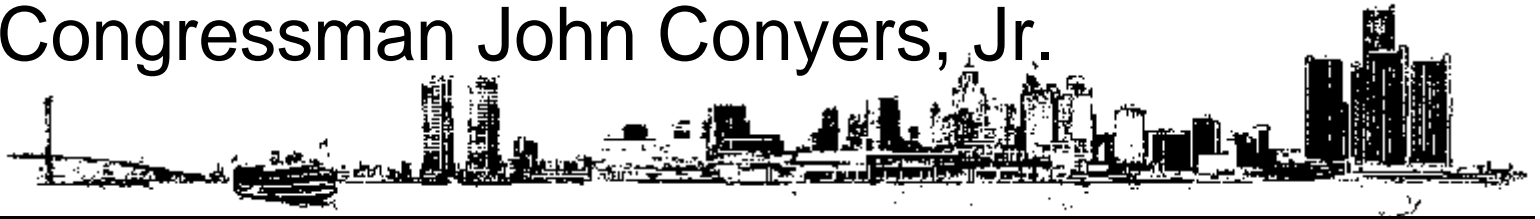


From the office of:

Fourteenth District, Michigan

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.



Ranking Member, House Judiciary Committee

Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus

For Immediate Release:
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Statement of Rep. John Conyers, Jr. Release of Jacqueline Jackson

I am pleased that Jackie Jackson will be released from federal prison facilities in Puerto Rico in two days. That's the good news.

The bad news is that she was subjected to repeated and outrageous treatment by the Department of Justice merely so our government could send a chilling signal to other would be protestors. In my view, she is a modern day political prisoner -- mistreated for her views, not her conduct. Her abuse and mistreatment represents a blight upon our system of justice.

As most of you know, I raised these objections early and often with the Department of Justice, including Attorney General John Ashcroft. Their response has been weak -- hiding behind the mistakes and misjudgments of low level bureaucrats.

I had and continue to have two main complaints. First, under the Bail Reform Act, Ms. Jackson should never have been subject to a bail requirement. A person of her standing and reputation should have been released pending trial on her own recognizance. She was no threat to flee or to cause physical harm, and under the law, she should have been released shortly after she was arrested and processed. I have the statute right in front of me, and it clearly states that the accused should be released unless the person is likely to flee or "will endanger the safety of any other person or the community."

Second, Jackie never should have been thrown into solitary confinement when she refused to submit to the humiliation of a full strip and body cavity search. The Department's own regulations as well as several recent legal decisions clearly state that prison staff only need to conduct a visual search where there is a reasonable belief that contraband may be concealed on the person. Again, I've got the Regulations right here, and they couldn't be more clear -- A strip search may be conducted "where there is reasonable belief that contraband may be concealed on the person."

Ms. Jackson was not carrying drugs, weapons or other forms of contraband, and the body cavity search required by the Department is nothing less than physical intimidation that would have made Bull Connor blush.

When a person of Ms. Jackson's stature and reputation can be so cavalierly mistreated and abused by our federal government, it should give us all pause. I'm concerned that ordinary citizens engaged in civil disobedience in Puerto Rico may be facing even more abusive treatment. As a result, even though Ms. Jackson will be released. I am calling for hearings on the way that U.S. citizens who haven't been convicted of a crime are being mistreated in our federal prisons. We will not let this issue die.